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AUTHOR Gilmore, Deanna Peterschick
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ABSTRACT

Learning environments have an impact on acquiring skills in reading as well as developing positive attitudes toward reading. Another variable that affects attitudes and aptitude toward reading is the "climate" or "environment" in which children learn their skills. This paper concentrates on the phenomenon that is reaching epic proportions in the nation, that of homeschooling. As part of a research project two public schools and two homeschools were observed over a period of seven months and 438 hours, and data were collected on the classroom techniques employed in each learning environment. A comparative analysis was made, using the following categories: provide metacognitive training; discuss students' beliefs; stress links between literature and students' lives; read often; read aloud to students; use high quality literature; avoid denigrating group placement; use peer tutors; use reading centers; use reading incentives; allow choice of reading material; use cooperative reading teams; use a recreational reading program; use questions to activate prior knowledge; have a positive classroom environment; and share books with others. Includes recommendations for practice. (Contains 22 references.) (NKA)

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Creating Positive Attitudes toward Reading in Public Schools and Homeschools

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Deanna Peterschick Gilmore, Ph.D.
Washington State University

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he looked upon,
That object became
And that object became part of him for the day
Or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycle of years.

This poem, written by Walt Whitman (Whitman, 1953), reflects the importance of our daily interactions with children; as parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, and daily acquaintances. Everyone who enters the life of a child, even for a brief moment, can have an impact on his/her life as that experience will be assimilated into his very being. One of the biggest challenges today is to prepare children to understand the nature of the world in which they are living, to find solutions to the personal and social problems they face and to lead rich and satisfying lives. The solutions to these challenges are normally found in the educational programs adults have formulated for the child. This necessarily leads us to the world of schooling, an institution that was developed to help children reach their goals and desires.

There are many types of schooling in America, such as public school, private school, charter school, homeschool, and personalized learning experiences. Whatever method one chooses, there is one important way that anyone can help a child understand the nature of the world in which he lives- that is through the act of **reading**.

Definition of Reading

Reading is one of the most important subjects to learn in any educational setting and it is through reading that children can open windows to the world and be able to pursue other challenges along the way. It is through the act of reading that children can enjoy literature, to discover what other people and cultures believe, and to develop ideas and beliefs of their own.

The elementary school years are significant in the area of reading for it is during this time that most children learn how to read. Success in reading seems to be the key to understanding all other curriculum areas (Harrison, 1994). The operational definition for "reading," is "the act of getting meaning from printed or written words" (Smith, 1996). In the simplest sense, reading means recognizing letters and groups of letters as symbols that stand for particular sounds (Smith, 1996; Gray and Rogers, 1956). In research, reading is often interchanged with the term "literacy." " Literacy" is the term used to describe the reading and writing processes. Recent evidence suggests that the reading and writing processes are reciprocal and dynamically influence each other (Reutzel & Cooter, 1992).

Researchers believe that although children cannot score above the norm on ability to read and comprehend, they can be encouraged to read more frequently, to enjoy what they read, to share what they read, and to develop positive attitudes about themselves as readers (Winograd & Paris, 1989; Maring, 1979).

Assessing Motivation to Read

Several states are interested in assessing motivation for reading as well as metacognition, which means that they want to know if children are thinking about what

they are reading. They are also interested in determining the best cognitive strategies to use in learning how to read, as well as deciding what role background knowledge has in comprehending reading (Cramer & Castle, 1996). Nationally, teachers want to know what effectively motivates students to engage in reading (Koskinen, 1994). According to Winograd and Paris (1989), students who feel competent in reading, have better attitudes and motivation for reading and they will attain goals they feel they can actually achieve (Haverty, 1996). Researchers are interested in understanding how children can become motivated to be lifelong readers (Koskinen, 1994).

Nation's Report Card on Fourth Grade Reading

There are other concerns on the horizon in regards to literacy. Most recently, the "nation's report card" for the year 2001 has been released, and it reports that the test scores of the nation's weakest elementary school readers have declined in the last eight years (NAEP Report Card, 2000). This is happening even as the strongest readers have shown solid gains between the years of 1992-2000. The National Assessment of Educational Progress report shows that fourth-grade reading skills have not changed since 1992, despite large-scale efforts for school reform. U.S. Secretary of Education secretary, Rod Paige (2001) states: "Fewer than a third of fourth graders can read at grade level."

Leading educators say that the results are distressing since researchers have reached a consensus on how students learn to read and how best to teach the skill (Haycock, 2001). Although the reading process is difficult to teach, the common ways that were used in the past included the following: 1) developmental method, 2) the whole-language

philosophy, 3) the language-experience method, 4) phonics instruction, 5) sight words and look-and- say instruction, and 5) individualized reading programs.

Over the last ten years however, numerous government-sponsored studies are finding that explicit instruction in sound-letter relationships and phonics practice, combined with exposure to rich literature, produces the best results (Haycock, 2001). Because of the emphasis on phonics, President Bush is planning to invest huge sums of money for phonics instruction and for annual testing of students (NAEP Report Card, 2000).

Reading First Initiative, 2001

The Bush Administration's proposed Reading First Initiative, embraces research-based approach to reading instruction. It calls for spending $5 billion over five years to teach early reading skills in the nation's Head Start to read by third grade (NAEP Report Card, 2000). This Initiative emphasizes the importance of improving the literacy rate among the young children of our country.

Problem

Children educated in the United States schools spend approximately twelve years learning how to read. In the early years they learn how to decode and understand the printed text. In later years they learn how to comprehend, assimilate and use information for different purposes. After completing school, however, too many of those children, who later become adults, do not voluntarily choose to read for their own personal pleasure or information (Cramer & Castle, 1996). It is also known that a positive attitude and motivation toward reading has a direct impact on literacy learning and success (McKenna, Kears, 1994, Haverty, 1996, Winograd and Paris, 1989). Researchers also believe that not only do attitudes develop as a result of the satisfying or frustrating

learning experiences we've had, but that once established, they either facilitate or impede further learning and become self-reinforcing (Mouly, 1960). Attitudes are also the result of self-concept, parents and home environment, age, sex, socio-economic status and children's interests. Based on surveys and research, there is also evidence that there is a need for improvement in the areas of attitudes and motivation toward reading at both the state and national level (Haverty, 1996).

Illiteracy and Aliteracy

Researchers and educators should assess attitudes toward reading because there is a correlation between attitudes toward reading and aptitude toward reading. If attitudes toward reading are low, then aptitude is correspondingly low (Woiwode, 1992). This is important to know as there has been a growing concern regarding the rates of *illiteracy* in the United States of adults and children. Estimates of the number of "*illiterates*" in the United States vary widely, but seem to average out to about one in five (Woiwode, 1992). That is, adults who cannot read well enough to use reading effectively in their daily lives total about 20% of the population. Of the four out of five people who can read, only one actually does. One authority states: "Once out of school, nearly 60% of all adult Americans have *never read a single book*, and most of the rest read only one book in a year" (Woiwode, 1992, p.1).

While *illiteracy* is a very serious concern, *aliteracy* may be an even greater one. *Aliteracy* has been defined as a "lack of the reading habit; especially, such a lack in capable readers who choose not to read" (Harris and Hodges, 1981, p.11). Television has had a major impact on the number of alliterate readers in the United States. According to a 1986 Gallup Poll, 14% of U.S. adults indicated reading as one of their recreational

pastimes; whereas in the pre-television year of 1938, 21% of the adult population chose reading as their recreational pastime.

Since there seems to be a problem with "illiteracy" and "aliteracy," in our country and there is a connection between attitudes toward reading and aptitude, it would behoove educators and researchers to discover those practices that lead to better attitudes toward reading.

Strategies for Improving Attitudes toward Reading

Research can inform the parents, educators and students regarding the various methods that have a positive impact on attitudes toward reading. One of the ways to improve attitudes toward reading is to read often (Smith, 1988). Students must develop the habit of extensive reading. Some of the other strategies that are known to improve attitudes toward reading are the following:

1) reading aloud to students (Herrold, Stanchfield, Serabian, 1989)
2) using high quality literature (Morrow, 1983)
3) avoiding denigrating reading group placement (Wallbrown, Brown, and Engin, 1978
4) providing metacognitive training (Payne and Manning, 1992)
5) openly discussing students' beliefs (Hudley, 1992)
6) stressing links between literature and students' lives (Guzzetti, 1990)
7) using questions to activate prior knowledge (Jagacinski and Nicholls, 1987)
8) peer tutoring (Haverty, 1996)
9) use of reading centers (Haverty, 1996)
10) use of reading incentives (Haverty, 1996)

11) choice of reading material (Mickulecky & Jeffries, 1986)

12) cooperative reading teams (Haverty, 1996)

13) use of a recreational reading program (Haverty, 1996)

14) positive classroom climate (Halpin & Craft, 1996)

Learning Environment and its Affect on Attitudes toward Reading

Learning environments also have an impact on acquiring skills in reading as well as developing positive attitudes toward reading. Another variable that affects attitudes and aptitude toward reading is the *climate* or *environment* in which children learn their skills. The climate or environment would be the atmosphere, tone, ethos, or ambience that is present in a particular home, school or classroom. Since most of us are products of the public schools, I will not describe them in this presentation but rather concentrate on the phenomenon that is reaching epic proportions in our country today, that of homeschooling.

Homeschools as a Learning Environment

Homeschooling can mean many things to different people. Generally, homeschooling involves having school-age children learn in the home, mostly under the direction of their parents (Ishizuka, 2000; Blumenfeld, 1997). There are two main types of homeschools, with much variation in between: The first type of homeschool uses traditional books, curriculum, tests, report cards, standardized tests etc., while the other uses the "unschooled" approach (Holt, 1970). This approach became popular when John Holt coined the term that describes learning without going to school. Around the 1960's and 1970's Holt, a teacher and he advocated progressive alternative schools. The parents let the child determine what is going to be studied. Then there are others in-between who

pick and choose from several approaches and do what they think is best for the child (Ishizuka, 2000; Mackson & Whitman, 1997; Hahn & Hasson, 1997).

Homeschoolers can purchase ready-made curriculums, or pool teaching resources through a homeschool Co-op. The homeschoolers may participate in distance learning programs or may even apprentice through a local craftperson or artist. As Ishizuka (2000, p. 23) states, "Many see the world as their classroom. When it is practiced to its full potential, homeschooling can become a very important aspect of family life." The number of homeschool students has increased significantly, and more than 1.5 million youngsters are now being homeschooled. This is approximately 2 percent of the total elementary and secondary students (Ishizuka, 2000 p. xxxix).

Homeschoolers have traditionally been seen as either religious fundamentalists or leftist radicals, but the growing movement is seeing parents choose homeschooling for more practical reasons; they want to provide better education for their children. Why are there increasing numbers of homeschooled students? Many parents seem to be unhappy with the public schools today. They feel that the public school system is not doing the work it should do. There are other diverse reasons for parents homeschooling their children. One of those reasons is the *adverse effect* of the school on the child.

Some parents also cite the ***negative aspects of peer culture*** in public schools, which include such things as premarital sex, drug use, and alcohol consumption. Also, the general atmosphere of the schoolyard is often fiercely competitive, cruel and exclusionary. Home educators maintain that it is the school and same-age peer immersion that causes emotional harm.

Other parents homeschool to *reclaim family closeness* or to *meet the needs of a child who is gifted or learning disabled* (Ishizuka, 2000; Blumenfeld, 1997). Many parents have been inspired to consider homeschooling due to the *recent violence* in public schools. Parents are concerned about school safety, especially in light of the recent school shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado, and Santa Cree, California (2001). Ishuzika (2000,) maintains that many parents want to be the *primary influence* in their children's lives. This includes passing on their religious, moral and other personal values as an essential aspect of their homeschooling.

There are other reasons parents decide to homeschool their children. Chief among the reasons is a desire for *more family time together*. For many children the optimal setting for learning is in the home, and more importantly is the love and understanding of caring parents who nurture a child's individual strengths (Hahn, 1996; Ishizuka, 2000).

Another reason there is a large growth in homeschooling, is the *growth of technology*. As a group, homeschoolers are more likely to own computers than other Americans families. A few years ago homeschoolers were thought to be on the "fringe of society," but that is no longer the case. Homeschoolers routinely gain admittance to some of the most competitive colleges and universities in the country. There are so many homeschool applicants that Harvard University has assigned an admissions officer to review their Applications (Ishizuka, 2000) According to many researchers, when examining the overall academic record, homeschooling appears to be successful. Researcher, Patricia Lines states (2001, p.7), "Virtually all the available data show that the group of homeschooled children who are tested is above average."

The key reasons parents consider taking their children out of the public school system are the following: *unwieldy class sizes*, *discipline problems*, and *weak academics* (Ishizuka, 2000). Nearly 60% of the parents maintain that they keep their children in the public schools because of the high expense of sending them to private schools. However, two-thirds of the parents interviewed said that their children attend public schools because they believe in the public school system and appreciate the diversity (Ishizuka, 2000).

In current times there seems to be a shift in attitudes toward homeschoolers from the public school system. Public schools are now reaching out to homeschool educators, allowing them access to the facilities and extracurricular activities in the public schools and must do so by law. Homeschoolers are also participating more in part-time public and private school courses.

As part of my research I observed in two public schools and two homeschools over a period of seven months and 438 hours and after analyzing the data I reached the following conclusions:

Homeschools	Public Schools
Provide metacognitive training:	Provide metacognitive training:
Homeschool teachers do ask questions about what the children are reading, but they have not had training to teach their children to think about what they're thinking.	Many Public School teachers are now aware of the values of having their students use metacognitive thinking skills and are practicing this with their students.
Discuss students' beliefs:	Discuss students' beliefs:
Homeschool teachers may discuss beliefs with their children, but they might be the same beliefs as their parents.	Children in public schools will have different beliefs and other children can learn about the world from them.
Stress links between literature and students' lives:	Stress links between literature and students' lives:
Homeschool students will be able to discuss literature and how it relates to their lives. Their teacher may be the only other person who is involved in the discussion.	Children in the public schools come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. There will be a richer discussion among many students.

Homeschools	Public Schools
Read often: [Based on the two Homeschools in this study] Homeschoolers read books more often than the students in the public schools. The children do not watch as much television and are inclined to read instead.	Read often: Public Schools follow a certain schedule and cover many subjects throughout the day. They do read often because most of the subjects involve reading. Unless they put it in the schedule, they do not always have time for independent reading.
Read aloud to students: Homeschooling parents read aloud to their children, often on a one-to-one basis. The younger children sit on their mother or father's lap when they are being read to.	Read aloud to students: Public School teachers do read aloud to their students. They are often interrupted by misbehaving children and do not get to hold the children in their lap.
Use high quality literature: Homeschoolers do not have as much access to high quality literature right in their homes. They can go to the public library and choose high quality literature. They can also order recommended literature from Inter-library loan services.	Use high quality literature: Public school teachers have greater access to high quality literature as there is normally a library in the school itself. Teachers have also been given instruction in the criteria for high quality literature.
Avoid denigrating group placement: Homeschoolers do not place their children in groups. Each child works on his or her individual program.	Avoid denigrating group placement: Some public schools still place children in ability groups for reading.

Homeschools		Public Schools	
Use peer tutors:	Homeschools do use tutors because the older children read to their younger brothers and sisters. Most do not have the opportunity to work with same age or older peers.	Use peer tutors:	Public Schools have more opportunities to have older children read to younger children who are not their siblings. Many public schools use cross-age tutoring.
Use reading centers:	The two home-schools I observed in did not have a read-ing center. They did have some books on shelves, but no specific reading center full of the various kinds of books, such as poetry, informa-tional books and magazines for children.	Use reading centers:	The public schools had specific areas set aside in the classroom for reading. There were many picture books, magazines and craft books in the centers.
Use reading incentives:	The two home-schools did not use reading incentives. It seemed that the children read books because they wanted to.	Use reading incentives:	The public schools may have better access to infor-mation about incentives for reading. The groups who sponsor such programs may contact the school often.

Homeschools	Public Schools
Allow choice of reading material:	Allow choice of reading material:
Homeschools do have some reading materials, but what the children read is closely monitored by the two teachers in this study.	Public Schools have more opportunities to do this because they have more resources at hand. Many public school teachers have an extensive library in their own classroom.
Use cooperative reading teams:	Use cooperative reading teams:
Homeschools do not use cooperative reading teams.	Public schools do use cooperative reading teams. The teams may help the good reader and the reader who has a hard time understanding.
Use a recreational reading program:	Use a recreational reading program:
Homeschools do not establish their own recreational reading program. They may join a recreational program at the public library.	Public Schools may establish their own program for after school or on Saturdays. The students may also participate in the program at the public library.

Homeschools	Public Schools
Use questions to activate prior knowledge:	Use questions to activate prior knowledge:
Homeschool teachers have an advantage in this area because they know the child and can tap in on the things the child knows already.	Public schools do not have the advantage of knowing about each child's life so, must draw ideas from several children which can be time consuming.
Have a positive classroom environment:	Have a positive classroom environment:
If the children are in a homeschool where the parents are kind and nurturing, this is an excellent environment for learning. Several homeschool students in this study, expressed the desire to have more friends their own age, and to attend the public school.	Public School students can have a positive environment depending on the quality of the teacher, and the make-up of the students. Public school teachers spend a lot of their time disciplining children.
Sharing books with others:	Sharing books with others:
This does not happen with peers as often as it should in the homeschools.	Students in public schools have more opportunities to to do this.

Recommendations for Practice

A. Homeschool parents should make every attempt to enroll their children in some extra-curricular activities outside the home, where the children will meet and play with other children their same age. Homeschool parents should arrange to have their children meet with other children once a week and discuss a book they have read in common. The homeschool parents could use the "literature circle" model (Daniels, 1997) to facilitate this endeavor.

B. Public schools should make every effort to invite homeschool students into their schools for collaborative work and for activities such as music, drama, physical education, and art activities. Public schools should also invite homeschool parents to work together on certain lessons where they can share their expertise in a particular area. Public schools should also invite the homeschool children to attend special assemblies and presentations. The public school teachers could ask their students if they know any homeschool children. If they do, they can become a "public school buddy." The "buddies" could then extend personal invitations to the homeschoolers to attend such things as the all day "Read In, " or the overnight pajama parties at the school.

C. Public schools should become aware of the devastating affect of placing children in reading groups, and should stop this practice entirely. The teacher can read with different pairs of students and students can read to each other. The teacher can also have the students read to them one at a time, and independently. The teacher can have volunteers come into the class to read aloud with the students, especially those who are experiencing difficulty. The state and government should

establish a payment for those elderly citizens and people who give their time to read with children. This might eliminate some of the unreliability that exists with those who volunteer their time, as opposed to receiving some form of remuneration.

D. Homeschools should develop a center in their homes where the children just go to read. In the center, there might be a special couch for reading, a rocking chair, or large movable bean bags. There should also be many shelves for books. The books should include a wide range of picture books, alphabet books, books of poetry, magazines, informational books, biographies, works of realistic fiction, historical fiction, folk tales, fairy tales, multicultural stories, craft books, drawing books, and others. If the parents can't afford to purchase these books and materials, they can collect them at garage sales and ask for discarded books at the local public library or public and private schools. The parents can also ask grandparents and relatives to give books, or subscriptions to children's magazines, for presents.

E. Public School teachers and Homeschool Teachers should have a joint education conference where they share their philosophies and pedagogy with others. There needs to be a greater understanding between the two entities

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